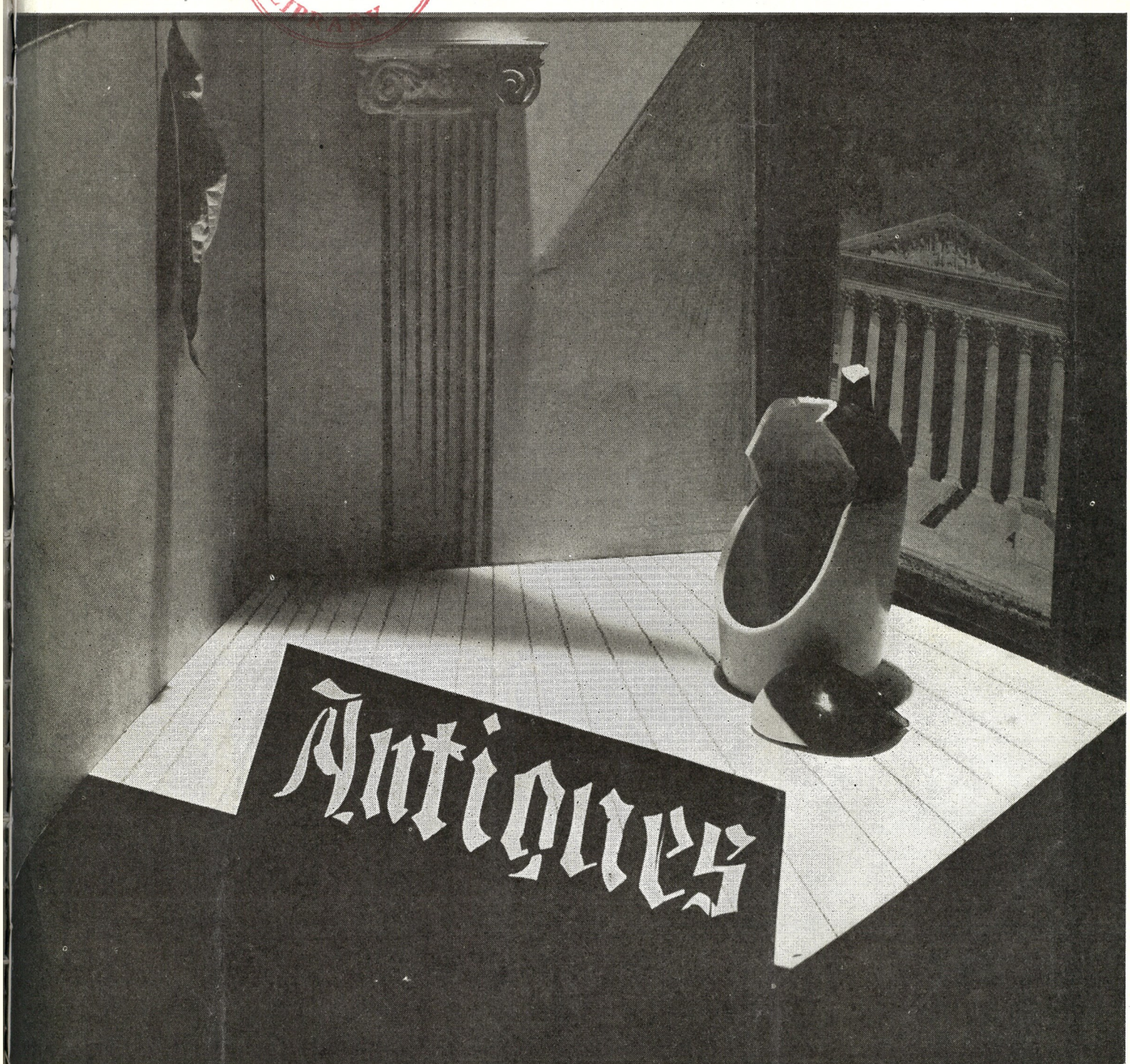
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IN THIS ISSUE: SHAPIRO ON PUBLIC USE OF ART
SPAIN: ARTISTS IN ARMS • TREASURY ART EXHIBIT



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ART FRONT

NOVEMBER 1936

EDITORIALS

THE CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL

THE Carnegie International awards this year proves that artists have little to hope for from the firmly entrenched Carnegie Institute. Art is not to be nourished in Pittsburgh, or at least no really modern or experimental art. That is the cumulative evidence of the successive biennials. And the award of prizes for 1936 does nothing to disprove the general truth. Even the *New York Times* speaks of the "pedantic" first prize winner, Lean Kroll's "The Road from the Cove." And the other prize-winning pictures are no more advanced in their style or conceptions, with the possible exception of the Bonnard and the Glackens. The Paul Sample "Barber's Shop" is definitely a step backward into the cult of the American scene.

Generally the most academic standards and styles are shown in the prize winning canvases. In the case of the Kroll, the flaccid inertia of academicism is best displayed in the legs of the reclining male figure, which seem made of straw or some equally lifeless material. This goes back, not to artists but to the policy of the institute. That policy plainly is to support academic art and "arrived" art. It is the policy which made the official Salons of France the mausoleum of culture; and it is the policy which makes the Carnegie International each successive two years less of a force in art.

In the case of the 1936 biennial this general trend is made more emphatic by the position the Institute has taken on the rental policy. Its refusal to agree to the payment of rent to exhibiting artists resulted in the secession from the exhibition of a score of well-known contemporary Americans. Thus backwardness of esthetic values is seen to have its corollaary in backwardness in social and economic values. Or perhaps the equation should read in the opposite direction.

A NEW ARTIST-MUSEUM RELATIONSHIP

SINCE, during recent years, individual artists, artists' organizations, layman committees, and art institution directors, have been concerned in establishing an equitable and professional relationship between the contemporary artist and the museums exhibiting his work, it is of national interest to spread the news of a local situation where a satisfactory approach has been mapped out.

The Milwaukee Art Institute was organized as a non-profit making corporation. Later it was financed to the extent of $20,000 a year from the city budget while the original corporation maintained responsibility with five of the twenty members of the board being city appointees; in 1932 the institution was to become completely municipally controlled, an action which the depression has deferred until 1937.

The artists' proposal to the Institute was that the artists through their organizations should take over complete artistic direction, from the designing of all printed material to the choosing of the jury from its membership, and the hanging of the exhibition. The local jury, serving without honors, democratically chosen, and vigorously setting high standards in public exhibitions, has been a tradition locally. The Art Institute was asked to assume managerial, financial, and clerical burdens in entirety. Inasmuch as the Wisconsin Society of Applied Arts and the more recently formed Milwaukee Printmakers have no academy taint because membership is kept open to all artists in the state demonstrating reasonable competence their memberships are sufficiently large and all inclusive to merit the leadership which has been delegated to them. Incidentally this leadership is not disputed by the existence of rival groups.

Director A. G. Pelikan, who is also director of art in the Milwaukee Public Schools and official U.S. government delegate to the 1937 International Congress on Art Education, in preliminary correspondence and conferences approved wholeheartedly of the general outline of the proposed basis for the November showing.

When the Milwaukee Art Institute opens its doors for the opening reception November 3, the people of Wisconsin will attend an exhibition unique in important respects.

It will have been financed and managed by the Art Institute. Funds formerly appropriated by the Institute and the organizations for prizes will be administered as purchase funds for the selection of a group of works at list prices to be added to the permanent collections of the galleries.

At the same time the artists' interest in, and direction of their own state showing in these two branches of the arts will have been encouraged and enlarged.

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PUBLIC USE OF ART

by Meyer Schapiro

THE present art projects are emergency projects and therefore have an obvious impermanence. It is possible that after the national elections an effort will be made to curtail them or to drop them altogether.

To the artists, however, the projects constitute a remarkable advance. For the first time in our history the government supports art, assigns tasks to painters, sculptors, graphic artists and teachers, or accepts their freely created work, and pays a weekly wage. The projects may be limited and the conditions poor, but the whole program is an immense step toward a public art and the security of the artist's profession.

What can artists do to maintain these projects and to advance them further toward a really public art?

It is the common sentiment that with the support of the organized working class these projects can be maintained. The art projects are parts of a larger government program which embraces many groups of workers, and the artists as workers can rely on the support of their fellow-workers, who will second their demands. But the interests of artists and industrial workers are not identical in this matter today. The industrial workers wish to return to regular and full employment and to obtain social insurance; the government projects and relief often reduce them to the status of unskilled labor and establish a wage far below the older union scale. The artists on the other hand would rather maintain the projects than return to their former unhappy state of individual work for an uncertain market. Even during the period of prosperity artists were insecure; now during a general crisis they are, for the first time, employed as artists. Workers and artists are not of one class or role in society. Artists are usually individual producers. They own their tools and materials and make by hand a luxury object which they peddle to dealers and private patrons. They employ an archaic technique and are relatively independent and anarchic in their methods of work, their hours of labor, their relations with others. Under government patronage they acquire a common boss, they become employees or workers, like the teachers and postal employees. But they are not yet really employees of the government, they are simply on emergency projects.

If conditions improve and the great mass of unionized workers are re-employed, what immediate interest will they have in demanding that one small group of temporary government employees, engaged in decorating buildings, should be kept permanently on the national payrolls, especially when the majority of workers have no assurance of permanent employment? Unlike the postal workers and the teachers, the artists do not satisfy a universally recognized need; their services are not available to everyone.

The possibility of working class support depends on the recognition by the workers that this program of art has a real value for them. It depends further on a solidarity of artists and workers expressed in common economic and political demands.

We can learn from the example of the architects. It is also in the interest of the architects to demand permanent government employment. But how can the government employ them? Chiefly by setting up permanent national housing projects, and projects for schools, hospitals and places of recreation. Now such projects, if designed to reach the workers, will have the support not only of the building workers, but of all workers, since they are poorly housed, and feel the urgent need of such construction. The workers will therefore support the architects in their fight, since the demands of the architects are also important demands of the workers.

We have also the example of the teachers and free education. Public schools were won by the persistent struggles of the workers and the Mechanics Societies of the last century; they were not simply presented to the people by a generous and enlightened state. The upper classes opposed them on the ground that free education would give the workers dangerous ideas. The workers demanded free schools precisely because schooling enabled a worker to read and write and to learn about the world; he could then defend his own interests better, form his own organizations, and judge more critically the dogmas of the church and the ruling class. But once the schools were established and the teaching was directed more and more toward fixing the workers' mentally along lines favorable to the ruling class, the teacher felt himself to be socially superior to the worker and alien to him. It was only when teachers showed their interest in the working class and its children, fought in the same struggles, united their organizations, challenged the school boards and legislatures in behalf of educational progress, that workers could be aroused to support the teachers in their special demands for better wages and conditions and for academic freedom.

It is necessary then, if workers are to lend their strength to the artists in the demand for a government-supported public art, that the artists present a program for a public art which will reach the masses of the people. It is necessary that the artists show their solidarity with the workers both in their support of the workers' demands and in their art. If they produce simply pictures to decorate the offices of municipal and state officials, if they serve the governmental demagogy by decorating institutions courted by the present regime, then their art has little interest to the workers. But if in collaboration with working class groups, with unions, clubs, cooperatives and schools, they demand the extension of the program to reach a wider public, if they present a plan for art work and art education in connection with the demands of the teachers for further support of free schooling for the masses of workers and poor farmers, who without such public education are almost completely excluded from a decent culture, then they will win the backing of the workers.

But to win and keep this support, the artists—for the first time free to work together and create for a larger public—must ask themselves seriously for whom they are painting or carving and what value their present work can have for this new audience.

The truth is that a public art already exists. The public enjoys the comics, the magazine pictures and the movies with a directness and whole-heartedness which can hardly be called forth by the artistic painting and sculpture of our time. It may be a low-grade and infantile public art, one which fixes illusions, degrades taste, and reduces art to a commercial device for exploiting the feelings and anxieties of the masses; but it is the art which the people love, which has formed their taste and will undoubtedly affect their first response to whatever else is offered them. If the artist does not consider this an adequate public art, he must face the question: would his present work, his pictures of still-life, his landscapes, portraits and abstractions, constitute a public art? Would it really reach the people as a whole?

If the best art of our time were physically accessible to the whole nation, we still would not have a public use of this art. To enjoy this art requires a degree of culture and a living standard possessed by very few. Without these a real freedom and responsiveness in the enjoyment of art is impossible. We can speak of a public and democratic enjoyment of art only when the works of the best artists are as well known as the most popular movies, comic strips and magazine pictures. This point cannot be reached simply by education, as the reformers of the nineteenth century imagined. It is not a matter of bringing before the whole people the objects enjoyed by the upper classes (although that too must be done). These pictures and statues are almost meaningless to the people; or they have the distorting sense of luxury-objects, signs of power and wealth, and are therefore appreciated, not as art, but as the accompaniments of a desired wealth or status. The object of art becomes an instrument of snobbery and class distinction. Art is vulgarized in this way and its original values destroyed. The abominable and pathetic imitations of upper-class luxury sold to the workers and lower middle class in the cities are often products of this teaching. The plans to improve the industrial arts, to produce finer house ware, textiles and furnishings for the people run into similar difficulties. And as long as the income of the masses is so small, as long as the majority do not have the economic means to recreate their own domestic environment freely, such improvement of the industrial arts affects only a small part of the people. The very limitation of the market finally hampers their growth.

The achievement of a "public use of art" is therefore a social and economic question. It is not separate from the achievement of well-being for everyone; it is not separate from the achievement of social equality. The very slogan "public use of art," raised in opposition to the limited and private use of art, attests to the present inequality. From this inequality flow many of the characteristics of both the private art and the commercialized public art. To make art available to everyone the material means for diffusing the degraded contemporary art, the printing presses and the admirable techniques of reproduction, must become the vehicles for the best art. But these today are commercialized; they are private property, although created and rendered productive by the labor of thousands. When they become public property, the antagonistic distinction between public and private in art must break down. Art would be equally available to everyone; you should be able to buy a print or a faithful replica of the best painting as you buy a book or a newspaper.

Before the levels of art which the artist values can become available to the masses of people, two conditions must be fulfilled—that the art embody a content and achieve qualities accessible to the masses of the people, that the people control the means of production and attain a standard of living and a level of culture such that the enjoyment of art of a high quality becomes an important part of their life.



Siding

JAMES LECHAY
Courtesy Another Place

The two conditions are not entirely distinct. The steps toward the first are part of the larger movement toward the second. And since the latter exerts a powerful influence on the imagination of artists, it inevitably reacts upon art.

To create such a public art the artist must undergo a change as a human being and as an artist; he must become realistic in his perceptions, sympathetic to the people, close to their lives, and free himself from the illusions of isolation, superiority and the absoluteness of his formal problems. He must be able to produce an art in which the workers and farmers and middle class will find their own experiences presented intimately, truthfully and powerfully. The shallowness of the present commercialized public art would then become apparent.

On the other hand, the masses of the people must control production before they can control their own lives; they must win a genuine social equality before culture can be available to everyone. Only free men who have power over their own conditions of life can undertake great cultural plans.

The artists who identify themselves with the workers in the struggle for this change, who find in the life and the struggles of the workers the richest matters for their own art, contribute to the workers a means for acquiring a deeper consciousness of their class, of the present society and the possibilities that lie before them, a means for developing a readier and surer responsiveness to their experiences, and also a source of self-reliance. The workers discover through art a whole series of poetic, dramatic, pictorial values in the life of labor and the struggle for a new society which the art of the upper classes had almost completely ignored. In strengthening the workers through their art, the artists make it possible for art to become really free and a possession of all society.

* * *

Now it may seem to some of you that this talk of socialism has carried us too far from the present program, that we ought simply to stick to our demand that the government extend the art projects to reach a wider public. I think this is a serious mistake. The artists must look beyond their immediate needs in making plans for a public use of art. They might obtain many concessions from Washington and win the support of large and influential groups of workers, and yet be no better off in the long run, perhaps much worse. Even if in cooperation with the unions they begin to decorate the walls of union houses and the homes built for workers with government subsidy, they

may find themselves without means of work or dependent on a brutal fascist regime.

The powerful unions in Germany were smashed by Hitler and their fine buildings confiscated. In Italy, while wages are being cut and the people marshalled for the battlefield, artists are employed by the fascist regime to decorate the walls of the government unions with frescoes showing dignified, massive laborers heroically and contentedly at work.

Government support of art, the cooperation of labor unions and artists, does not in itself solve the insecurity of the artist. They may provide a temporary ease and opportunity for work, but the unresolved economic crisis will soon grip the painter again.

More important, this government patronage and this cultural cooperation with the unions may divert the attention of the artist and the members of the unions from the harsh realities of class government and concealed dangers of crisis, war and fascist oppression. Artistic display is a familiar demagogic means; the regime which patronizes art confirms its avowals of peace and unprejudiced concern with the good of the people as a whole. In 1764 after the ruinous Seven Years' War, the artistic adviser of the French king recommended that he decorate his new palace with paintings illustrating royal generosity, love of peace and concern for the goddesses. Today this choice does not exist. A regime that must hold the support of the people today, provides conventional images of peace, justice, social harmony, productive labor, the idylls of the farms and the factories, while it proposes at the same time an unprecedented military and naval budget, leaves ten million unemployed and winks at the most brutal violations of civil liberty. In their seemingly neutral glorification of work, progress and national history, these public murals are instruments of a class; a Republican administration would have solicited essentially similar art, though it might have assigned them to other painters. The conceptions of such mural paintings, rooted in naive, sentimental ideas of social reality, cannot help betray the utmost banality and poverty of invention.

Should the artist therefore abandon his demand for government support of art? Not at all. He must on the contrary redouble his efforts to win this demand, since the government project is a real advance. But he must develop in the course of his work the means of creating a real public art, through his solidarity with the workers and his active support of their real interests. Above all he must combat the illusion that his own insecurity and the wretched state of our culture can be overcome within the framework of our present society.

ARTISTS IN ARMS

by Ben Ossa -- Critics Group

THE EVENTS leading to the great upheaval in Spain are known to all. Four months have gone and the courageous struggle of the Spanish people against the fascist hordes goes on unabated. Thousands of workers have shed their blood in the defense of their democratic rights. Millions of men and women have also learned that in times such as these it is better to die fighting than to live forever in misery. But, what has happened to the artists during these trying times? Have they also responded to the historical call to arms and joined the masses of Spain in the new battle for freedom and liberty? Very little is known of their fate, but by piecing carefully those small items we see every day in the Spanish press, we are able to understand that a new revolution is taking place in Spain. A revolution of a different nature and character, a movement of such great intensity and power that in the end may affect radically the future of the plastic arts in that peninsula.

Historical conditions forced the writers, artists and intellectuals of Spain to band themselves about a year ago into an organization known as "The Alliance of Intellectuals for the Defense of Culture." Its Plastic Arts Section, from the very first day, was in the forefront of the bitter struggle against the brutal forces of the reaction. In June of the present year, and when the smoke of the first battle cleared from the streets of Madrid, the Alliance swung its forces into action. Many artists joined the Popular Militia. Among them we may mention the ones known to the American public: the great sculptor Alberto, the art critic Serrano Plaja, the elderly and respected painter Chicharro, Ramon Peinador, Helios Gomez, Luis Quintannila, etc. But the hundreds of members of the Alliance, from their magnificent new headquarters seized from fascists hands, the palace of Heredia-Spinola, laid their plans for the terrifying task of saving the Spanish Republic. A large fleet of trucks was created in a few days, with the special mission to carry on the work of propaganda and education for the illiterate masses of the people. Writers and artists, working shoulder to shoulder with printing-trade workers, seized every available printing plant. Newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets were printed by thousands, and brought to the front lines, to the barracks, to the trade unions, and to the wounded in hospitals. The Popular Culture Committee was thus created. Other committees like the one formed by archeologists, artists and art critics, searched every palace and private house for paintings and manuscripts. Hundreds of works of art and important books were recovered, catalogued and distributed to museums, universities and public libraries. Within one month two new art museums were opened to the public. One of these, the palace of the former Duke of Alba, known to contain one of the most famous collections of private paintings in Europe, was inaugurated with a memorable lecture by the art critic Vegue y Goldoni. He spoke to a crowd of workers and art students pointing out in his lecture, that a revolution was necessary to bring to the eyes of the people the hidden art treasures of the nation.

To the Plastic Art Section fell the important task of preparing all graphic material for propaganda and educational purposes. Railroad cars were decorated with cartoons and slogans. Newspapers and magazines appeared with brilliant and artistic covers and forceful drawings. Posters were made and are being made to cover every aspect of the fight. Among

the artists who have contributed to the design and execution of these posters we find the best, both commercial and fine art men: such as Bartolozzi, Alonso, Garran, Giron, Gil Guerra, Hortelano, Izarra, Maroto, Moline, Peinador, Puyol, Penagos, Prieto, Sancha, etc. We read with admiration that a brigade of 30 graphic artists, painters, sculptors and photographers has been sent to the front to obtain records and to execute drawings on the actual scene of the battlefields. Among those engaged in this task we find men like Juan Mingorance, Jose Loygorri, Manuel Cortes, Vicente Suarez, Miguel Garcia Camacho, Jose Maria Sancha, Anibal Tejada, Salvador Arribas, Rafael de Penagos, etc. As a direct result of this dangerous commission, the artists working behind the lines were able to organize traveling exhibitions, with actual documents, and coordinate the work of the Writers and Historians Committee working on the records of the civil war. Special drawings and posters were circulated among soldiers, dealing with definite subjects such as tactics, sanitation and education.

Other artists more interested in future conditions, organized themselves into a committee of Education and Museums. A new revitalizing program of studies was mapped out for the old and antiquated art school: the Academia de San Fernando. The reorganization of the Museums has been considered and plans to that effect submitted to the authorities. The response of the latter to the artists' proposals is left to the end of the present article.

And after four months of hard fighting and terrible hardships we find the artists of Spain strongly welded together into trade unions which are affiliated to the great syndical groups, regardless of their special field or training. We find the labor label attached to drawings, posters, paintings and sculptures, and the patronage shifted from a special group to the great masses of people through their syndicates and trade unions, and through the popular newspapers and magazines.

The government is grateful to the artists of Spain. Even though it is faced with the critical question of its own existence, the necessary decrees were enacted reorganizing the art teaching and the museums of the republic. Minister of Education Jesus Hernandez, addressing a group of newspapermen on September 12th made the following statement:

"I have studied everything that concerns the artistic wealth of Spain, and the danger of its being destroyed by the fascist rebels. We must preserve it at all costs. A plan has been formulated in order to reorganize the art teaching, and towards the creation of new museums, etc. Aside from the most pressing needs of the hour so far as the propaganda of the People's Front program is concerned, my office is taking definite steps in order to solve the economic problems of the artists, whose position I am well aware of. The state must help the artists, especially today when so many of them, by enforced idleness, face poverty and hunger. We wish to protect also the art students in order that their lives may be devoted entirely to the pursuit of a worthy career. More specifically, I wish to state that I am determined to see that the Department of Fine Arts of the government ceases to be an archeological and dead organism and that it transform itself into a vital and creative center of artistic life. It must be the instrument for reforging the new artistic Spain. I have appointed to the post of Director of the Prado Museum, and in charge of all Fine Arts sections of the government, a man who has the respect of all Spaniards and the admiration of the world, **Pablo Picasso**. His knowledge, his world-wide reputation, his achievements fit him better than any other for this important task."

The artists of the United States cannot ignore the noble and important part played by their brothers in Spain, a country which in spite of a brutal attack by the enemies of culture and civilization, has become the hope of the world, a country where the artistic patrimony of the nation has ceased to be the monopoly of a few privileged individuals. They also may profit by the lesson of Spain and learn to look upon the working class as their allies and friends in the struggle against fascism.



Spanish poster for recruiting the workers' militia

"OFFICIAL ART"

by Elizabeth Noble

"THE association of the Treasury Department with art goes back to the earliest days of our history since it was to the Treasury that Washington himself gave the command of federal architecture." In this sentence, quoted from Forbes Watson's introduction to the Treasury Department Art Projects exhibition, "Sculpture and Paintings for Federal Buildings," on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art till the 6th, the keynote is set for the official art of the United States. The Father of our country gave "command" of art to the Treasury Department; and there art must remain for the rest of our days.

The proposition stated in this manner is ridiculous. But the fact is by no means absurd; on the contrary the symptoms of official art are distinctly alarming. Already in the two years since the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry J. Morgenthau, initiated the present Treasury Department art program, a structure has been developed which augurs ill for the future of art in federal buildings—and by that token of art in the life of the nation.

Historically government commissions for post offices and court houses and other public buildings have been part of the spoils system, commissions dependent on political nepotism, awards tendered by juries whose academic composition left no doubt as to their aesthetic sympathies. As a result the land has been plastered with murals out of Puvis de Chavannes by Ezra Winter. This has been the public art heritage in the past. And the public has been long suffering, either from the patience of Job or from ignorance. Only a few souls sighed with despair at the pallid Justices, Temperances, Mercies and Wisdoms, which dotted the lunettes of our public buildings' foyers and lobbies.

But when the economic crisis forced the government to become a patron of art on a far wider scale than ever before, the public began to hope for better times, chiefly because the official promoters of the various government programs spoke so largely of the artistic "renaissance" about to dawn on the country. Therefore the acute disappointment occasioned by the first public showing here of the fruits of the Treasury Department program. Here we have not only the perpetuation of a relation between the Treasury and art begun in Washington's time, we have also the perpetuation of the aesthetic standards of Washington's time. In other words, the present-day murals might just as well have been painted in 1783 as in 1936. They reek of old manners in painting and of old ideas. This despite the fact that men of undoubted ability, as George Biddle, Henry Varnum Poor, Reginald Marsh and Maurice Sterne, have been pressed into the government service. Naturally even the best painters cannot be expected to execute strikingly independent and original work when they are required to conform to the sterile and deadening conceptions of a style which went out of fashion with John Singer Sargent and Sir Edwin Abbey.

This decline in standards is the more notable in comparison with the W.P.A. federal art exhibition, "New Horizons in American Art," which ended at the Museum of Modern Art on the 12th of October. The Federal Art Project born of the social realities of the crisis, and emancipated from any traditional attachment to officialdom, has permitted its artists a somewhat freer though still too restricted hand in their work. The resulting difference is notable. The murals of the Federal Art Project, though not attaining the highest plastic quality, are vastly superior to the wooden and stereotyped creations of the Treasury Department Art Projects.

We state this judgment at the outset so that there will be no beating about the bush. The Treasury Department art program has a better fighting chance of surviving changes of administration and the cyclical waves of "recovery" than any other art program. It has potentialities for good or ill, therefore greater than a temporary or emergency program has. And if in its first two years, it promulgates dangerously conservative and academic standards, then this fact must be stated now in the hopes that these standards will be revised and brought up to date, in regard to future commissions and awards.

In Mr. Watson's introduction emphasis is placed on "the Treasury's traditional association with government architecture" to explain "the logic of placing the government's one permanent section of painting and sculpture in the position which it now occupies." This position is as a branch of the supervising architect's office, which in turn is under the public buildings branch of the procurement division of the U. S. Treasury. "In short," the introduction continues, "the Treasury Department, having had as one of its traditional duties the supervision of Federal Architecture, has now taken over the educational and aesthetic work of adding distinction to its architecture by means of painting and sculpture. . . . The present program is the first completely organized plan to coordinate painting, sculpture and architecture. This cooperation between the three great arts is what gives the program its essential character of permanence and its social and educational force."

This "cooperation" is expressed somewhat as follows. The government needs a building, a post office, court house, mint, customs building, etc. The plans are accepted, after going through the academic official mill of the hierarchy above described. Then as an afterthought, murals and sculptures are mentioned. A local committee is appointed, "of which one member is always the architect of the building." And the painters and sculptors are brought in after the event. The building has been planned, with no thought that murals and sculptures are to be organic parts of its whole; and the architect who drew up the blueprints without designing any places for murals and sculptures has a vote, and perhaps a deciding vote, as to what murals and sculptures shall go into *his* building. This very sequence indicates the minor and subordinate position accorded painting and sculpture by the Treasury Department, which has made itself the custodian of the "three great arts."

This definition of the balance of power between architecture, painting and sculpture might be rationalized were it not that the traditional record of official architecture in this country is so shamelessly bad. We have distinguished urban vernaculars; we have splendid adaptations of imported styles, as in Bulfinch's State House in Boston or the Greek Revival which flowed through the cities of the Eastern seaboard. We have authentic native geniuses like Richardson, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. We have occasionally an original design like Bertram Goodhue's Nebraska State Capitol or as an extremely modified expression of the international style, Howe and Lescaze's Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building. We have the noble communal architecture of the Indian pueblos of the Southwest. But we do not have more than a dozen Federal buildings which can stand the light of day without blushing. Hence the aesthetic impropriety of permitting the architects of these buildings to be arbiters of the other two great arts, painting and sculpture.

This impropriety expresses itself in re-

lation to painting in the sizes and shapes of wall space available to the artist. One does not require that a wall to be covered with a mural has to be as pure and isolated in space as the canvas for an easel painting. Part of the aesthetic difficulty—and dignity—of the mural lies in the fact that it does not hold aloof from life, but lives as part of its external environment, the building in which it is placed. A classic example of this acceptance of the building is to be found in Orozco's frescoes at Dartmouth, in which a ventilator on one wall is an integral part of the artist's design. But on the other hand, one is not justified in expecting the artist to turn himself into a trapeze artist, balancing on the tight wire of an aesthetic tour de force. In a sense the extremely narrow curved panels allotted Henry Varnum Poor constituted this sort of tour de force; they compelled the artist to perform miracles of adjustment in composition and perspective; and by this fact, in a sense they distorted the artist out of his own proper sphere. In such an instance the painter was made to become a handmaiden or follower of the architect; his function became a secondary one; and naturally his art was bound to suffer as a result.

On the whole, probably the painters and sculptors have suffered far more from the caliber of the juries and local committees they had to satisfy than from the architectural sterility of the edifices they have had to adorn. Cases are known in which local committees have admitted they deliberately selected a design which they did not consider the best one submitted, recommending an inferior design because they were convinced the powers that be in Washington would not O.K. a really modern or advanced design. Or in other cases, the awards have been made by political manipulation, instead of by the open competition which is stated in the introduction to the current exhibition's catalog to be an essential feature of the Treasury machinery.

The fact that generally speaking the Treasury art hierarchy has exemplified in its personnel and standards those qualities which are always to be found in "official" art may best be observed by studying the designs for the new Federal buildings in Washington, the Department of Justice Building and the Post Office Building. For these Poor is executing twelve small panels, Biddle five large panels, Marsh two large panels, these practically completed and installed, and Boardman Robinson and Maurice Sterne two series, entitled respectively, "The great codifiers of Law, ancient, medieval, and modern" and "The search for Truth and the history of Justice." In addition



Street in Gloucester **A. TROMKA** *Courtesy A.C.A. Gallery*

panels are being done by the following artists, Karl Free, Ward Lockwood, George Harding, Doris Lee, William Palmer, Frank Mechau, Alfred Crimi, Rockwell Kent and Eugene Savage, while John Steuart Curry is preparing murals on "The movement of the population westward across the country and the freeing of the slaves" and Leon Kroll a lunette on "The defeat of Justice and the victory of Justice."

To be sure, these are but a handful of the 350 artists working throughout the Union in some hundred cities for the Treasury Art Projects. Nevertheless these buildings, located in the national capital and representative of the highest official architectural excellence, indicate what the Treasury wants in the way of art. It certainly does not want art of a radical experimental nature, certainly nothing like the duco-airbrush murals of Siqueiros or the carved brick-painted cement sculptures of Noguchi. It does not want anything as provocative as the cartoons of Gropper; for when this artist works for the government he has to tone himself down and turn out a nice winter country scene, gifted but scarcely his best manner. It does not really want sweatshops; for when George Biddle, after a terrific row with the authorities, finally gets approval for his design, entitled "The sweatshop and tenement of yesterday can be the life ordered with justice of tomorrow," he takes for models not actual dwellers in tenements and workers in sweatshops but friends and acquaintances from the bourgeoisie.

On the contrary, the government wants from art safe and harmless clichés, allegorical justice triumphing over a fictitious evil. The capitals used in the titles above suggest the quality of this abstract and meaningless personification of social forces. Today we have injustice in the cruelest and most brutal forms, racking its victims on the subtlest instruments of torture. We have everywhere the most overt and violent expressions of the crying ills of society. But we do not capitalize these ills and believe we have disposed of them by painting a portrait in pastel tints. The real social commentator in art today must portray his subject with great objectivity and realism; from the specific instance he may hope to proceed to the general principle. But he cannot settle his problem by treating it like Watt's "Hope," sitting blindfolded on the world. The artist is up against the most difficult question of all, how to find a contemporary statement for a contemporary theme. This is a question not only of aesthetics, but also of social and economic considerations.

It is possible that the government might be able to manage the aesthetics, but certainly it has never been the habit of official groups to encourage consideration of social and economic problems. The chief function of academies and institutes and ecoles dex beaux arts is to maintain the status quo on the art front. And unfortunately the Treasury Department art projects seem on the way to taking over this function for the United States. In the past, the country has been blessedly free from conservative agencies of this nature. Even our World's Fairs have been the children of private enterprise, not of government bureaus. And if they have

erred on the side of bad taste, it has been in the sacred name of commerce.

Now, however, we find the government, on behalf of the "three great arts" and for the sake of a "relief art project" setting up a structure which embodies all those dangerous traits against which the members of the Salon des Refuses were battling seventy years ago. To judge from the accomplished facts of official art in the United States today, there might as well have been no impressionist movement, no Seurat, no Cezanne, no van Gogh, no Gauguin, let alone all the contemporary expressions of dissent and protest. In other words, American mural painting is back where it started, with Sargent in the Boston Public Library.

As for sculpture, vide the examples exhibited at the Whitney, it has gone even farther back, beyond the cast-iron deer and the cigar-store Indian, back to some dim bourne which memory happily cannot recall. There is an anecdote of a city which wanted a bronze statue of an Indian to commemorate the French and Indian wars and got one second-hand, cheap in a Brooklyn junk-yard. This is the way the examples in the Whitney show impress us. They were picked up cheap. And if the poverty of official and academic art ever needed demonstration, here is the proof.

In all this jeremiad, it must be emphasized that the criticism is not leveled at the artists per se. They obviously could have done much better work than they have been permitted to do. If there are victims of social injustice, the artists might well be numbered among them for having had to bow to the will of the bureaucracy. The criticism here is the same old story, the complaint against a system of art administration and control which puts laymen in power and which permits lay opinion to rule. The question whether a design is a good design or a bad design is not a question susceptible to a mathematical equation, like devaluation of the dollar or going off the gold standart. We are not willing to have the Treasury usurp the function of superintending creative pictoral and plastic functions of which (by the testimony of its own deeds) it knows little or nothing.

Plainly, if the United States is to have a permanent section of painting and sculpture, as stated in the passage quoted above, it is time for artists and all others who love art to consider seriously in whose hands its guidance should be. The exhibition at the Whitney Museum is one indication of where not to place this important function.

EXPRESSIONISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

by Charmion Von Wiegand

IN the last decade, the ancient quarrel between objective and subjective painting—a dispute paralleling similar disputes in philosophy and in literature—has been the bone of contention between the Abstractionists and the Surrealists. The preceding decade of 1926 to 1936 dramatized this familiar dualism in the terms of Cubism versus Expressionism. During that time, the Expressionists in Germany were absorbed in pursuing their souls across the chaos of post-war society in the quest of a spiritual revolution divorced from crude materialist political and economic change. In contrast, the Cubists of France, in the midst of post-war social disintegration, sealed themselves into ivory towers and, coldly serene as surgeons, dissected the physical world and its all-too-human beings into the formal elements of eternal art.

Today the anarchistic, individualist revolt of the Expressionists of Germany seems as far away from the contemporary American scene as the crusades of the middle ages. American painting, little influenced by the currents of mid-European art, reacted scarcely at all to their dynamic outbursts of line and color. But, in the last years, one by one, many mid-European painters have come to the United States to stay. With the advent of Hitler, a new wave of German intelligentsia arrived. Up to that moment, the United States had exerted more influence on the distinguished visiting foreign artists than they on it. Archipenko, once a rebellious Futurist of great reputation, has become an academic professor of art; George Grosz, the once great satirist of Prussian autocracy and social decadence, has taken to painting landscapes; David Burliuck, former "Blue Rider," paints murals for the Federal Art Project but retains a social point of view. The one mid-European painter to leave his stamp on recent American painting was Jules Pascin, who spent some years in New York in the golden age of the twenties. His style, a fragile modernist Roccoco of pre-war Europe, affected such diverse painters as George Biddle, Emil Ganso, and Yasuo Kunyioshi. His influence was, in part, due to the pleasantly sensuous nature of art, his frivolous avoidance of serious subject matter or experimental problems. Possessing a dextrous technique, he was fated to enchant the painters of American prosperity with a surface charm, which became his nemesis; while those more serious exiled artists, who had suffered all the agonies of the post-war epoch, could of necessity not be appreciated until the American artist had experienced some equally disturbing social upheaval. This was furnished by the economic catastrophe of 1929. Only now, after seven years of economic stagnation and unemployment, has the American artist began to revolt against the conditions of capitalist society. Only now has appeared a situation favorable to the creation of Expressionist art in the United States.

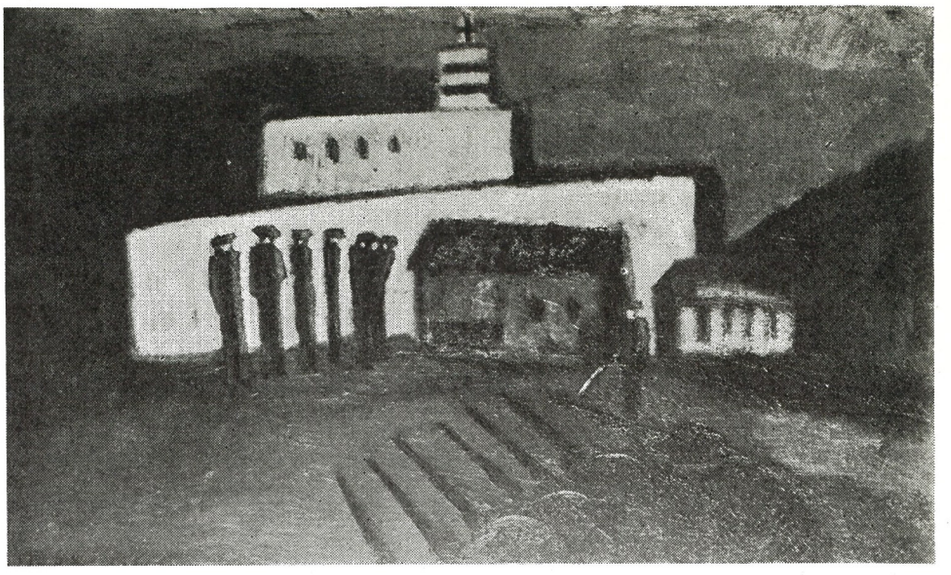
Expressionism as a form in art (this includes poetry, drama, music and literature as well as the plastic arts) arises always in a period of great social change, when the individual is forced to repudiate the principles on which society is built. Rebelling violently but without program, he turns to the inner voice of conscience and to his his own repressed instincts for new wisdom and guidance. Out of the surrounding disintegration of social forms, arises the stark and lonely soul of man definitely facing the universe, seeking in the whispers of his blood and in his dreams, in madness even, in the romantic past of primitive cultures, in the exotic surroundings of natural man, a safe escape from the complexities of modern life, which has ceased to function satisfactorily for the vast majority, because of serious inner contradictions within the body of society. Such an attitude of defiance may lead either to fascism, as in the case of Hans Johst, the dramatist, or to Communism as in the case of Berthold Brecht. Such a confused rebellion is animated by both reactionary and progressive elements. But the general movement of Expressionism which seeks to break up the old forms, suffuses them in the brilliant colors of sunset, espouses the universal man against the petty individual, is *forward* moving. Its destructive activism is necessary in clearing the ground for future building.

For this reason, the recent exhibition of the work of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff at the Westerman Gallery, was of great interest for American painters. Here was shown an Expressionist painter, who enjoyed a

great prestige in Germany in the years 1913 to 1924. Here was a painter, once known as a rebel, who has continued to live in Nazi Germany and is now shown in a German gallery here. For the most part, the thirty-six canvases and water colors exhibited belong to his recent years (after 1926) and, in particular, the last two years, but the inclusion of three canvases from his ripe period around 1913 offered the spectator a measure by which to interpret what happens to the creative artist under the repressive regimentation of Nazi Germany.

Back in 1903, three young painters of Dresden founded a new school of painting. With the usual fanfare of manifestos, protests, and a scandal over their first exhibition (1906) held in a store for lighting fixtures, they were born as *Die Bruecke*—the bridge between the old world and the new. Their names were Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Erich Heckel. Appearing almost simultaneously with the Fauves in France, the Expressionists emphasized the subjective revolt of the individual. Later they took over many of the technical innovations of the Fauves—the use of broad masses, the demand for monumental pictures which stretched the limits of the easel, the use of complementary color in brilliant juxaposition unhampered by local color; the distortion of form to evoke emotional response. They were joined by other enthusiastic painters, among them Max Pechstein and Emil Nolde and all of them later made art history. Their most powerful influences in painting were van Gogh; the Swiss painter, Hodler; and Edvard Munch, that strange Norwegian, whose spectral evocations on canvas are curiously akin to Strindberg's nightmare dramas.

It is difficult today before the present work of Schmidt-Rottluff to dramatize the rage and resentment which these young painters stirred up in the correct society of old Germany. There even the most advanced art connoisseurs felt themselves daringly liberal when they espoused Impressionism—albeit a diluted Berlin official version represented by the work of Corinth and Liebermann. In the light of the present, the step between the followers of Monet, Pissaro, and Manet, and the disciples of Cezanne, Gauguin, and van Gogh, does not seem unbridgeable. Socially, the young Expressionists belonged to the petit bourgeoisie as did the Impressionists from whom they sprang. They reached beyond their own class only in their dreams; their revolt had much of the religious fervor and mysticism of the tumultuous time of the Reformation. They sought to shatter the foundations of the old world but could not break even the shackles of their own class.



Execution in Spain — PAUL MOMMER

Courtesy Midtown Galleries

At first, they shocked and excited the indignation of the bourgeoisie. In the twenties, after the middle classes had suffered defeat and economic bankruptcy, they were tolerated and even became popular with the most advanced sections of it.

Schmidt-Rottluff's richly composed patterns, Pechstein's reflexions of primitive South Sea art, Nolde's religious vision, Erich Heckel's nervous lyricism, Otto Mueller's angular maidens, Kirchner's dynamic drawing—nothing here reaches beyond a personal protest and Bohemian rebellion. These men did not come to an understanding and espousal of the social struggle in political terms, as did some few younger artists, for instance, George Grosz. The work of the Bridge summed up in the light of latest history displays a decorative rather than plastic sense of color; an emphasis on ornamentation rather than on content; a rather superficial interpretation of French experiments. True, the German audience was much further behind the French audience, than were the German painters behind their French masters and this must have had some effect in retarding experiment and discouraging ability. Dissolved in 1913, the Bridge merged into the larger group of the New Secession in Berlin. The latter, a revolting branch from the first Secession, was amalgamated with the Blue Riders (Blaue Reiter), the leading Expressionist group in Munich. Headed by Franc Marc, Vassili Kandinsky, and later Paul Klee, the Blue Riders were more daring in their experimentation, more directly concerned with the problems of their craft. Their influence was brought to bear on the Bridge painters. In particular, Schmidt-Rottluff felt the impact of Kandinsky, whose ideas left the most lasting impression on German modernist painting, and who today in Paris has his followers.

The two schools—the Bridge and the Blue Riders—were the focus for the most radical Expressionism, although many painters of note, such as Lyonel Feininger, Karl Hofer, Otto Dix, Oskar Kokoschka, Max Beckmann and others, never officially joined them. Kandinsky, a Russian by birth, became the high priest of subjective absolutism in painting. His unrepresentative art, highly individual, related closest to the Cubists. But while the plastic of Picasso and his school approached closest to sculpture through its concern with three dimensional volumes of the physical world interpreted in idealist idiom, Kandinsky's abstract art, motivated always by a spiritual idea, remained essentially mystic and closer to the art of music. A fundamental barrier separated the art of Expressionism from the majority of the French modernists. The latter, remaining in the classic tradition of Europe, occupy themselves primarily with the problem of form and space. The Expressionists' chief concern is with line and rhythm, often to the exclusion of the third dimension, and leading to a painting of ornamentation like written music. In this, they follow the secondary line of western painting as found in Gothic art; in the 14th century Siennese, like Simone Martini; or in Botticelli, Tintoretto, El Greco, Mathias Gruenewald and others. Many critics not visualizing that its approach is totally different, have assumed that it may be inferior. Nevertheless, it remains the fundamental esthetic on which oriental art is based.

When the Expressionists—John the Baptists of a new world, riders of the



Landscape, 1913 — Schmidt-ROTTLUFF

Apocalypse—were faced with the onslaught of the war, and drafted into the German army, they marched off singing "Deutschland ueber Alles." Max Pechstein, enjoying a South Sea idyll in the Pacific, made his way home across America to enlist. Schmidt-Rottluff served out the duration of the war as a private soldier. The young Franz Marc, August Macke, along with many other artists and writers, fell fighting. To many was vouchsafed a sudden understanding of the meaning of the war and a consequent revolt. But the painters of the Bridge lived through the great historic events of the Russian Revolution, the defeat of Germany, the failure of the German Revolution, the economic paralysis, without becoming socially active or experiencing any profound change in their art. The brief cultural reinassance which flowered in Germany from the blood of German workers was expressed by a younger generation—one which actively entered the class struggle—Piscator, Toller, Brecht, Eisler, George Grosz and others. With stabilization, the reaction was again on top and the promise of a new world was superseded by the active, more difficult struggle for a better life in the actual world. Once confused rebels, now facing sharp issues, they had to choose between Fascism and Communism. Some frightened by former boldness were driven back along the path of reaction. Others took a definite stand. One great class-conscious artist—George Grosz—has left the record of those years from 1918 through the middle twenties, a living panorama of that time, which castigates the old classes in cold hatred—the Prussian military castes, the inflation parvenues, the smug bourgeoisie.

How irreconciliable the conflict was and what the "cultured" bourgeoisie thought of such art may be summed up in the words of Wilhelm von Bode, leading art critic of Germany and curator of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum: "This new culture of Dadaism which for almost a lifespan has deformed art, and, not the least our German art, is the last expression of a mixture of insanity, lust, and emptiness. It must be conquered, and if we no longer have the energy to do so ourselves, then Bolshevism will make an end of it and of us at the same time." It is clear that Hitler's attack on modernist art fully a decade later, merely reflected the bitter prejudice and hatred of the decaying bourgeoisie against all progressive ideas. For even in its remote and ivory-tower attitudes, modernist art has moved for the most part in a progressive line.

In studying the canvasses of Schmidt-Rottluff, one may see what happens to the artist esthetically, when he refuses to come to grips with social reality. The three early canvases loaned by Mrs. Riefstahl show a deep consideration for the organization of form—they exhibit a severe and narrow concentration on essentials and an emotionally satisfying palette. The two landscapes are somewhat reminiscent of the early Kandinsky. Today Schmidt-Rottluff's color has become more vivid but less functional; it serves an illustrative purpose chiefly. Several of the larger simplified canvases would serve for excellent posters. Nor is this said in a derisive spirit but merely to point out that commercial art in the last ten years has caught up with the Expressionists and makes use of their discoveries on its own level. There is nothing inherently bad in this, rather it proves the creativeness of art. Certainly Picasso and Matisse have profoundly changed the industrial arts of today—even down to the furniture we use and the fabrics we wear. What distresses is when the creative artist is unable to go on changing and creating.

In the case of Schmidt-Rottluff, an over simlpified neo-realism replaces the former interest in form, a color formula has grown out of former color experiment. Little is left of the exuberant recklessness which gave the Expressionists such verve and freedom. In some of the water colors, the sketches of leaves and feathers and small things have the painstaking detail of old German painting, and I for one prefer them to the late oils—for here is naturalism freshly observed. The recent paintings suffer from a poverty of idea and an evasion of reality made more apparent by their approach to realism. These lyric idylls of seascapes and moonscapes seem unreal and cold in a world of bitter conflict today.

No one can envy the lot of the artist or the writer in Germany today. Few of them are willing to strut in Nazi uniform like the corrupt Gottfried Benn, former Expressionist poet. The majority suffer in silence, their work repudiated in their homeland because it is modernist and in the outside world because it is German, they lead a shadow life, deprived of life-giving currents of thought and action which alone can give meaning to art. Everything that is creative in Germany has either been destroyed or thrust underground to await another spring.

But the forces which caused Expressionism to flower in post-war Germany are active in other lands. The same struggle takes place elsewhere in terms of today. For this reason the Expressionist artists must have a deep interest for America. Neither abstract art nor academic pictorialism are satisfactory means to embody the social struggle of our time as it assumes ever more dramatic and violent form in the United States. While the religious mysticism of German Expressionism is alien to us, its activism is a vehicle suited to American vitality. It is not possible to predict what forms American expressionism may take, but we already have a few painters working in

Expressionist form, who point the way. Helen West Heller's painting is a link between that older Expressionism and the present, as is David Burliuk's work. Younger painters who follow in this line include the group of painters called the Ten, and Benjamin Kopman, Milton Avery, Herbert Kruckman, Alice Neel and John Vavak. The latter's picture *Whirling Dust Storm* in the recent exhibition New Horizons in Art of the W.P.A. Federal Art Project at the Museum of Modern Art demonstrates how a contemporary American subject may be realized in Expressionist form. There are undoubtedly other painters who are developing in this direction. American democracy is changing under our eyes. As the process gains momentum, whatever its direction, the situation for the rise of Expressionism in the arts will be born.

EXHIBITION NOTES

A.C.A., 52 W. 8th St.—Paintings of designs for the "Artef" Theatre by Moi Solotaroff, a notable expressionist in the field. Oct. 18-31. Work by Tromka. Nov. 1 to 14. Oils by Suzuki, winner of last year's one-man show competition at A.C.A. Nov. 15-28.

Another Palace, 43 W. 8th St.—Oils by James Lechay, a painter of subtle harmonies evoking the stillness of city streets. Through Oct. 31. Elias Goldberg, a sensitive painter working along experimental abstract lines. Nov. 1-30.

Artists Gallery, 33 W. 8th St.—A handsome new gallery on 8th St. devoted to digging up important unknowns among our contemporaries. Opens with Hans Boehler, a European who paints in a twilight key. Through Nov. 7th. A first one-man show by one of the sturdiest painters in town, Ben-Zion. Known for his distinctive contributions to exhibits of the "Ten" group.

Artists Union, 430 Sixth Ave.—Show of union members, including people like Helen West Heller, George Browne, Louis Harris, Balcomb Greene, Philip Evergood, etc. Plenty of good pictures in the exhibit. Painters with names from I to O to be picked for next show Nov. 5.

Contemporary Arts, 41 W. 54th St.—First John Kane, now Lawrence H. Ledbuska, a genuine and touching primitive with a special flair for sensitive-looking horses. Oct. 12-24. Louis Bosa. Oct. 19-Nov. 7. Woodcuts and drawings of Bernard Essers. Nov. 1-14. Tony Mattei. Nov. 9-29.

Downtown Gallery, 113 W. 13th St.—Zorach, Fiene, Brook, Walters and others.

Durand-Ruel, 12 E. 57th St.—Painting by Renoir since 1900. Through Nov. 14.

Guild Art Gallery, 32 W. 57th St.—Sensitive brush drawings by Milton Horn. Oct. 19-Nov. 7.

Kleeman, 38 E. 57th St.—Water colors by Walter Pach. Nov. 9-28. Painting by Edna Bernstein. Nov. 30-Dect. 12.

Kraushaar, 730 - 5th Ave.—Exhibit of good French paintings. Oct. 20-Nov. 7.

Julien Levy, 602 Madison Ave.—The latest paintings of Georgio de Chirico. Oct. 27-Nov. 17. The work of Max Ernst, probably the most profound of the surrealists opens Nov. 18-Dec. 9. Also the work of Leanor Fini.

Pierre Matisse, 51 E. 57th St.—Work of John Ferren. Soft, prismatic abstractions. A sort of feminine Kandinsky. Oct. 6-24. "La Dance" original sketch for the Moscow decoration by Henri Matisse. Oct. 27-Nov. 29.

Marie Harriman, 63 E. 57th St.—Show of still lives by important Europeans, opening Nov. 9.

Midtown Galleries, 605 Madison Ave.—Nostaglic landscapes by that persistent romanticist Paul Mommer. His "Execution in Spain" tops the work of this artist. Oct. 13-31. Watercolors "N. Y. Water Scenes" by Saul. Nov. 3-14. Painting by Waldo Pierce. Nov. 16-Dec. 5.

Municipal Art Gallery, 62 W. 53rd St.—Several notable groups opening on Oct. 19 through Nov. 8, including the names of Milton Avery, Bertram Hartman, Rifka Angel and Raphael Soyer.

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—A rather belated retrospective of America's foremost artist, John Marin. Oct. 21-Nov. 22. Important review will appear in next issue of Art Front.

New Art Circle, Neumann, 509 Madison Ave.—Max Weber, B. Kopman, Arnold Friedman, Lee Gatch, Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Chagall.

Mrs. C. J. Sullivan, 57 E. 56th St.—Paintings by an old American, Henry A. Ferguson, Oct. 20-Nov. 10.

W. P. A. Gallery, 6 E. 39th St.—Artists who instruct in the W.P.A. Federal Art Project free classes for children and adults are having a chance to show their own work from Oct. 19.

CORRESPONDENCE

AMERICAN CONGRESS VERSUS PHOTOGRAPHY

To the Editor, ART FRONT:

On the heels of October's ART FRONT, with its comprehensive "Photographer as Artist" by Berenice Abbott comes an announcement from the American Artists' Congress of its exhibition "America—1936," to which a footnote is added in parentheses, "(photographs excluded)."

Now, to be sure, the battle for photography as art was won years ago, or so we thought, when "Camera Work" published a monumental record of photography. But apparently not, to judge from that footnote, which illogically enough is appended to a section reading: "MEDIUM: Any black-and-white-exemplary process may be used. This is intended to include, in addition to the usual 'hand' processes, such mechanical reproducing processes as offset lithography, line- cut, etc. (*photographs excluded.*)" (Italics mine, parentheses the announcement's.)

The question is, why the discrimination? The Artists' Congress has among its members a number of photographers, including Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke-White, Barbara Morgan, Ralph Steiner and Paul Strand, not to mention Rockwell Kent, who has recently added the camera to his conquests. And presumably these photographers were admitted to membership as artists. At least some of them donated photographs to the recent sale by the Congress of works of art for the Spanish loyalists.

If photographers are artists, is not photography art? It certainly is a black-and-white multi-exemplar process, on a par at least with offset lithography and photo-engraving. And to judge from the wide popular enthusiasm for photography evinced in "U. S. Camera 1936," the photograph has come to stay in the United States in 1936, even if it will not be admitted to the Artists' Congress "America-1936."

In fact this seems not only discrimination, but a serious error of judgment, to omit what is one of the most popular media of the day. In fighting fascism, the congress' avowed objective, the camera is a very handy weapon.

ISABEL COOPER

●

A PEEP AT THE CARNEGIE

The Sun, Oct. 17. Henry McBride:

"So coolness and suavity rate with us at a premium, and with a conventionally academic jury distributing the honors, the coolest and suavest of our men, Leon Kroll, walked off with the first prize and the $1,000 that went with it. His picture was entitled 'The Road From The Cove.' It is an operatic picture. It shows one of those young men who work half-naked on the reconstruction projects overcome by the midday sun and lying at full length on the turf. A nearby woman eyes him pityingly as though he were dead and another advances on the left, much in the style of Kirsten Flagstad, to sing 'He is not dead, he sleepeth. . . .'"

EXHIBITION IN SUPPORT OF DEMOCRACY IN SPAIN

by H. Baron

THE recent exhibition in support of the struggle for democracy in Spain was not intended to be an art exhibit. The primary reason for the show at the A.C.A. Gallery was to raise funds. The American Artists' Congress, pledged to oppose war and prevent the establishment of conditions that are conducive to the destruction of culture, sent out a call to its New York members and other artists of New York for pictures and pieces of sculpture to be displayed and sold for the benefit of the Spanish People's Front. Within ten days of the call a catalogue of the works donated was printed containing two hundred and two items. About fifteen more came in during the two weeks of the exhibit.

Among those who have contributed, to give only those whose names begin with the first two and the last two letters on the list, were Berenice Abbot, A. Abromowitz, Rifka Angel, George Biddle, Alexander Brook, Arnold and Lucille Blanch, Will Barnet, Peggy Bacon, Henry Billings, Simon Braguin, Joseph Biel, F. Bullinger, Maurice Becker, Benett Buck, A. Birnbaum, Juan Bracho, Ben Benn and A. S. Baylinson; A. Walkowitz, Anna Walinsk, Margaret Zorach, Sol Wilson, G. Zilzer, Alfred Zalce, D. Zorach and William Zorach. Other names just as important and prominent in the art world were to be found in the long list of contributors.

The sculptors as a group were especially generous and their names must be listed even at the risk of converting this brief review into a Who's Who in art: Aaron Goodleman, Gwen Lux, Minna Harkavy, Vincent Glinsky, John Cunningham, R. Cronbach, Adolf Wolf, Paul Manship and Warren Wheelock.

It is obviously impossible to review an exhibition of this nature by appraising the quality of the works displayed. The amazingly high artistic level of the show was a tribute to the generosity of all exhibitors. This generosity stimulated the gallery visitors—and there were many of them daily—to equally magnanimous impulses. The amount raised is still unknown at the time this is being written. It can be stated confidently, nevertheless, that the total sum will be a considerable contribution.

The exhibition raises a moot problem. There is a good deal of discussion among artists as to the wisdom of donating their works for this or that cause. There can be no question that the artist's generosity has been taxed to the breaking point. The writer is of the opinion that as a rule the artist should resist all appeals for his works unless a reasonable percentage of the proceeds of the sales be turned over to him. Like all rules, however, this one, too, has exceptions, which, broadly stated, are the building of an audience for art. The exhibition under discussion without a doubt achieved this result. The progressive, democracy-loving people have shown their intense sympathy with the struggle of the Spanish people. The exhibition for the purpose of helping that struggle identified art with life; and the more art is made to function in that capacity, the greater will be the artist's reason for existence.

* * * *

Note: In his article Mr. Baron expresses undoubted sympathy for the Spanish people in their struggle against the fascists. It is surprising therefore to read the rule to which he proposes to submit the voluntary contributions of artists, while his exception is even more puzzling.

Mr. Baron feels that artists should contribute to political causes, *e.g.,* against war and fascism only when they can hope to increase the audience for art, only when people will be indirectly stimulated to buy or at least to talk about their pictures. In other words the artists who freely gave their work to the recent show did so to some extent because they felt that through the bond of a common sympathy for the people of Spain a certain gratifying exchange of paintings and cash might be encouraged. Otherwise the artist should confine himself to signing petitions.

This is the implication—whether Mr. Baron wants it drawn or not—and it offends the artists who made the show possible. What were they thinking of when they sent in their work? That they had a commodity whose unquestionable value would receive more attention in the friendly atmosphere of a people's front? Or that they wanted to give without reserve either to preserve democracy or to see a workers' and peasants' government victorious in Spain? And the artists in Barcelona who paint railroad cars with the symbols of the trade unions? Those like Helios Gomez who captured the first fascist machine gun in Plaza Cataluna? Are they secretly hoping that the workers in Valencia will admire their efforts and promise to buy an oil or a woodcut some day?

Mr. Baron is a patriot of art. The artist, clear or muddled, but always the artist. Fascism must be vanquished because it destroys culture. But not all culture and not every artist. There are numbers of artists doing very well for themselves in Germany and Italy under state subsidies. In Italy they are even organized into a "corporation." Mussolini honors them by his fifteen minute presence at an exhibition of a few hundred paintings. What more can one wish?

Mr. Baron might say that the artist cannot express himself under fascism. We should say he is allowed to express nothing but himself. And if he has nothing to express? There are artists like that too.

The artist who has nothing to say contributes to himself, not to an oppressed people. He thinks that his union exists only to guarantee his wages. The union as an instrument in the transformation of society, the artist as a transformer—that he can't understand. Idealist about his art, naive economic materialist in his relations with society, he thinks the public use of art means filling courthouses with blindfolded women and senators' offices with 24-32s.

The artists who gave their pictures to the Spanish show were not defending Culture with a capital C, abstract Culture. They were trying to help create a culture with specific historic content formed under the stress of great social and political struggle. In this struggle there are enemies, fascists, landowners, industrialists, big merchants, the church—and friends, the workers, the peasants, millions of the people of Spain. Hating and loving as a man the artist has something to say here. It is not a matter of finding more people to look at his pictures.



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